

Chapter 1:

Finding Partners/Enlisting Community Support

One of the best things you can do to achieve wetland conservation in your local focus area is to find other people who share your interest, and enlist their help and/or support. Whether you are just beginning the process or have years of successful efforts under your belt, there is probably no more efficient use of your time than to find kindred spirits to help achieve your goals.

Try to recruit community groups, local government officials, and key “opinion leaders” in your area. Many people form opinions on issues based on what their friends and neighbors say. The more people you can find who are supportive of your efforts, the easier it will be to achieve your goals. Some people to consider inviting to participate include:

Local Landowners — The people who own some or all of the wetland areas you want to protect are obviously the place to start. Even if they are not initially supportive, it will be to your benefit to continue to work with them and keep them informed of your progress. Also, don’t forget to work with landowners adjacent to the wetlands and others who live throughout the watershed. They will likely be concerned about the effects of your efforts on their drainage—and rightfully so. You need to be able to show that your efforts will not affect their drainage. Better yet, show them how much water your wetland will hold, allowing the runoff from their lands to move downstream faster than before. Recognize that you probably won’t please everyone, so don’t expend too much effort on any one person unless you see that he/she is becoming more open to your ideas. If possible, talk with the previous owners of the land that you are trying to conserve. If previous landowners sold the land because they could rarely grow a successful crop there due to flooding, that can be powerful ammunition for convincing the present landowner to cooperate with your efforts, especially if you can provide options that will benefit the owner.

Federal, State, and Local Government Agencies — The government agencies have staff who can provide information, expertise, and technical help. They can provide a wealth of assistance, and most of it is free. The major agencies you should contact are listed below (see the Directory at the end of this document for contact information).

- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** — This is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that was formerly known as the Soil Conservation Service. NRCS staff work with landowners and wetlands throughout the state every day, and they will be able to provide a lot of the technical help you need. They also may have a lot of other useful information, such as:
 - Contact information for the landowners around your project area.
 - Contact information for all the other government agencies who may be able to help.
 - Information about local conservation organizations.
 - Information about land trusts in your area.
 - Knowledge of funding opportunities for your conservation efforts.
 - Aerial photos of your area.
 - Information about the soils in your area.
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)** — This is an agency of the U. S. Department of the Interior. They do a lot of wetland restoration work throughout Indiana and across the country. They have field biologists who can provide technical assistance, and they have landowner incentive programs for wetland restorations.

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – This federal agency has jurisdiction over wetlands through the Clean Water Act. The EPA also administers grants for wetland conservation and clean water initiatives.
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – At the state level, the DNR is the first place to seek help, and there are many different divisions within the agency that can provide assistance, such as the division of fish and wildlife, division of soil conservation, division of water, division of forestry, division of law enforcement, etc. Several of these divisions have specialists located throughout the state who are assigned to help landowners with conservation initiatives. Examples of these specialists are: conservation officer, district forester, district wildlife biologist, soils specialist, water resource specialist, and nature preserve specialist. Several divisions have landowner incentive programs that can provide financial assistance, tax benefits, and other benefits for conservation efforts.
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) – This state agency has primary jurisdiction over water quality concerns in the state, and has an interest in wetland conservation because wetlands have significant impacts on water quality. By the Clean Water Act's Section 401 (Water Quality Certification), IDEM has the authority to review federal permits that may result in materials being discharged into waters under state jurisdiction, so that the actions will be consistent with Indiana's water quality standards.
- Local Units of Government – In the early stages of your project, you should contact your drainage board and county surveyor. Ask about the history of the area you're interested in. Does it have a history of poor drainage? How are other landowners affected? If there are any county drainage easements on your proposed project area, you'll need to maintain them. Consider how these easements might affect your restoration efforts.

Schools and Universities – If the wetland you are interested in conserving is publicly owned or has public access, look for opportunities to create an outdoor laboratory for use by local schools. These labs benefit teachers and students, and they add publicity to your efforts. Schools can set up programs where students donate funds or collect recyclables and donate the proceeds to your project. Local colleges and universities can be great sources of information, and may be able to use the wetland as a study site for graduate research projects. Don't forget to contact the telecommunications department, as they may be able to provide photo and video resources. The university library can also be an excellent resource.

Local Media (Newspaper, Television, Radio) – Keep the media informed of all your efforts, especially when you have an "event" that might make a good story (field day, school tour, restoration activities, etc.). If you hold a media event, be sure to provide the reporters with any materials they may need to get a good story and have a positive experience (for example, waders or a boat, mosquito repellent, a fact sheet or news release, etc.). Form and maintain good relationships with the local reporters. Write letters to the editor about the benefits that wetlands (and your wetland in particular) provide to the local community. Make appearances on local radio and television shows.

Local Businesses – Businesses located adjacent to wetland areas may be impacting the wetlands without even knowing it (parking lot run-off, etc.). Contact any businesses in the watershed that have or could have a connection with your project. Many will be eager to help—especially if you offer to help publicize their cooperation. Wherever possible, buy supplies for your projects from local businesses—it's the perfect opportunity to spread the word about your project, and you might even get discounts on needed items. Ask to speak with the manager or a person who has authority to provide discounts. Tie your purchases to the wetland project. See if the business would be willing to provide a discount in exchange for the positive publicity. If a business manager has heard negative things about your project, try to win him/her over little by little, describing the project and your goals every time you go in to buy from the store.

Community/Service Organizations (Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.) – These organizations are interested in efforts that benefit the local community. They may be able to provide volunteer labor and/or funding for your efforts. They also can provide a forum for discussing your project goals because they are constantly looking for presentations and speakers for their meetings. Make presentations that include slides, video, or other visual images at their meetings. Be sure to show a lot of beautiful, scenic images, and try to include wildlife. Be prepared to spend some time after the meeting to discuss the project in greater detail with anyone who is interested. If you meet people who live or grew up near your project area, spend some time with them. They may be able to provide a wealth of information about the history of the area, or they may share a unique experience they had in your wetland. This kind of information can be very valuable in your publicity efforts.

Local Conservation Organizations – Because conservation is central to the mission of these organizations, they are an obvious choice for finding partners and supporters. Many of the county-level conservation organizations have booths at the county fair. Once you find one or two of these organizations, they will be able to lead you to more. Examples of conservation organizations include:

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Indiana Wildlife Federation (local affiliates)
- Ducks Unlimited
- Waterfowl USA
- The Audubon Society
- The Sierra Club

(For contact information, see the Directory at the end of this document.)

Land Trusts – Land trusts are not-for-profit organizations that purchase land (or easements on land) for the purpose of conserving the natural resources associated with it in perpetuity. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a national land trust that has an active chapter in Indiana, and there are several other land trusts operating throughout the state (see Directory for contact information). If there is a land trust in your area, be sure to contact them early in the process. They can provide tremendous insights into many aspects of the project you may be undertaking (seeking nonprofit status, acquiring land, conservation easements, etc.). They may be interested in acquiring the land you are concerned about if it is unique or offers benefits that match their mission.

The Limberlost Experience – ACRES Land Trust

Limberlost Pilot Focus Area Coordinator Ken Brunswick describes how partnering with a land trust really helped move the Limberlost project along.

ACRES Land Trust was a major partner that helped the Limberlost Pilot Focus Area tremendously during the early stages of the project. In 1994, Limberlost partners met with the ACRES Land Acquisition Committee. In a little cabin beside a lake in Whitley County, a major plan was formulated for the purchase of approximately 400 acres of the Limberlost Swamp. The project would not have been completed without ACRES moving into a leadership role in the acquisition phase.

In addition to the leadership it provided, ACRES pulled the Limberlost Focus Area through a tight spot in 1996. We were relying on Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) funding to provide some of the needed revenue for purchasing a 45-acre parcel of land. When the parcel was ranked too low to be eligible for WRP funds, ACRES personnel led us to the Ropchan Foundation and the M.E. Raker Foundation, which both made key donations at a time when the project's completion looked bleak. Because of ACRES, we were able to acquire this important land.

We are very pleased and fortunate to have ACRES as a partner, and we continue to draw on its insights and experience in our ongoing efforts to restore the Limberlost Swamp.

All of the agencies and organizations listed above (and others like them) can be located through the help of the local chamber of commerce, community volunteer agencies, and the phone book. It is important to continue enlisting community support throughout the life of your program. This will help to ensure you will have enough volunteers to meet the goals of the program and that it will not suffer from a lack of new ideas or insight. When starting a wetland stewardship program, it is important to remember that community ownership and pride will be key factors in its success.

“Opponents” to Your Efforts – Do not be afraid to meet with people and/or organizations that oppose your efforts or hold different opinions. Their opposition may be based on misunderstanding or miscommunication, in which case a simple meeting might net you some new partners. Even if they are philosophically opposed to your efforts, it is important to know what the issues are, why they feel the way they do, and what common ground you may share.



Black-crowned night heron